

Youthful outrage at an injustice half a world away served as a spark for a Canadian-based philanthropic organization, Free the Children, which has eased the pain of thousands of children. And Craig and Marc Kielburger have no intention of resting on their considerable laurels.



When Craig Kielburger was 12, he saw a newspaper story about a Pakistani boy sold into virtual slavery, doomed to a life of unceasing menial labour. It angered him. He may only have been a Grade 7 student at Bishop Scalabrini school in Thornhill, Ont., north of Toronto, but surely, he thought, there must be something he could do to strike a blow against this terrible injustice.

There most certainly was. Eleven years later, Craig, 24, and his brother Marc, 29, run a handful of international philanthropic organizations geared toward improving the lot of children in countries such as India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Ecuador and China. Their solution is a practical one. They raise money and awareness of the problem and use those funds to build schools, health care and economic empowerment programs in some of the world's poorest communities.

To date they have helped create 450 such schools in 21 locations. About 40,000 children a year are given an opportunity to escape a seemingly unbreakable cycle of poverty, misery and early mortality.

Last year, their three charitable organizations, Free The Children, Leaders Today and Me To We, raised almost \$14-million, of which 65% came from the pockets of Canadian school children. To help cover administration costs, they also started a for-profit venture called *MetoWeStyle*, a made-in-Canada clothing line with sales of \$300,000.

Just 7% of the charitable donations raised goes toward administrative overheads, and the brothers want to keep it that way. While half of *MetoWeStyle* profits go to Free The Children, the balance is used to subsidize and, with luck, eventually replace the hefty costs of maintaining a global operation.

They are shining examples of a new kind of entrepreneur — the social entrepreneur, young men and women who use their considerable skills to create and grow philanthropic organizations.

"Social entrepreneurship is a parallel to that of business entrepreneurship," says Marc Kielburger, executive director for Free The Children. "To create what we have done demands all the same skills, the same commitment. The only difference is the goal.

"In business, it is the creation of shareholder value; with social entrepreneurship, it is the creation of social benefit."

In the case of Marc, those skills include a magna cum laude degree from Harvard in International relations and an Oxford University law degree, won on a Rhodes Scholarship. Craig, 24, graduated in June from the University of Toronto.

Their singular achievements to date have won the pair a wall full of awards including three Nobel Peace Prize nominations, the Nelson Mandela Human Rights Award, the World Economic Forum GLT Award, the Roosevelt Freedom Award and the Governor General's Medal of Meritorious Service. Both have been recognized as one of Canada's Top 40 under 40 prize winners.

Neither Kielburger had any idea that a 12-year-old's indignation at something happening halfway around the world would lead to an international organization that has changed the lives of tens of thousands of children. "I read this newspaper piece about a boy named Iqbal Masai in Pakistan and took the clipping to school," says Craig. "I thought we should do something about it."

That something was a small fundraising drive. Then one fundraiser led to another. Marc was working in Thailand with HIV/AIDS patients so Craig pressed on alone. Nor really alone, though, he says.

Their work became a family affair. After graduating from Oxford, Marc joined his brother to shoulder the growing burden of administrative work created by Free The Children; together, they founded the subsequent ventures. Father Fred and mother Theresa, both teachers, have volunteered at a number of Free The Children projects. Their interest is in China, teaching in the remote rural west of that giant nation. They have been supportive from the get-go, Craig says.

Supportive enough to let him go back-packing with a family friend through India and southwest Asia in 1995. The 12-year-old



Free the Children founders Craig, left, and Marc Kielburger, plan to expand their school-based donation program into the United States.

saw child rescue operations; he saw new rehabilitation and educational institutions being created by international aid groups. It sparked an idea.

"It was then I decided we should use those school fundraisers to build a school and rehab centre just like the one I saw," he says.

Back in Canada he became an evangelist for children's rights, speaking to schools and, in fact, any group willing to listen. The money began to roll in.

"I think 1998 was the watershed year," says Marc. "That was when we won the public support of people like Jane Goodall and Bishop Desmond Tutu."

In 2000, the pair created another organization called *Leaders Today*. This group takes high school students for two- to six-week stints to work on Free The Children projects around the world. The teens pay between \$1,000 and \$2,500 plus airfare for the experience. This year, *Leaders Today* will see 1,000 Canadian teens jetting off to developing countries under its banner.

The third initiative, *Me to We*, got its start two years ago. The pair found a ready audience of both children and adults wanting to get involved in philanthropy and support of

international development but lacking information on how to get started. The result is a Web site and a best-selling book that has become a one-stop resource.

Last year they created *MetoWeStyle*, a marketer of made-in-Canada clothing. Profits are split between donations to Free The Children and financial support for the 150 young men and women who actually manage the trio of organizations.

Having a profitable business base will likely prove crucial, Marc says. To date, his salary comes from a \$50,000 Ashoka Fellowship, while Craig's income is from a TD Bank scholarship.

Now firmly established in Canada, this year the pair plan to expand their school-based donation program into the United States.

The vast potential of the U.S. market could transform Free The Children from a worthwhile but relatively small organization to a global giant.

"That is what we want to be," says Craig. "We want to show that anyone, including children can make a difference in the world."

FREE THE CHILDREN

Head office Toronto
Business sector Philanthropy
Market Global
Revenue \$14-million
Number of Employees 160
Web site www.freethechildren.com

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